

About Microhistory and Khoikhoi Studies:
A few Voices from South Africa in the Global South

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*'[F]or historical studies, disciplinary or otherwise,
the past cannot not matter'* (Zoltán B. Simon, 2023).

ABSTRACT

The process of reclaiming ‘lost histories’ is also about directing current and future *histories*. In certain areas of existing historiography where research gaps are identified, the application of the microhistorical method is a productive, under-utilised tool that serves both micro- and macro-historical requirements.

This investigation into a recent study by R.S. Viljoen shows how Khoikhoi studies in particular, and ‘lost histories’ in general, can benefit from microhistory’s arguments for, the capacities of, including the justifications for, microhistory. Brief references to South African historians, confirm traces of the development and increased application of the microhistorical method that yields constructive research outcomes when applied. At least three recent MA studies (by young students) support this view.

These findings point towards productive recent developments from the South African historical community of the Global South. This study also points towards the *early* beginning of the use of the microhistorical method in South Africa with periods of non-use of this method that led to the relatively late take-off of microhistory.

Key words: arguments for microhistory, capacities of microhistory, history of emotions,

Khoikhoi studies, ‘lost histories’, reclaiming histories, Global South.

1. Introduction

For almost fifty years *microstoria*, now generally referred to as microhistory, remains to be characterised by diverse debates.¹ Whether it is an autonomous field of study,² a methodological approach,³ with influence or not on general history⁴ or that microhistory is not always history of the excluded, the powerless or of the far away,⁵ drive this diversity.

From the advent of microhistory in the mid-1970s, Carlo Ginzburg's and several other scholars' efforts to explain his study objects, became sources for continuous debates but without diminishing the influences they had or continue to have⁶ on the business of historical writing.

Arguably, the most common denominator about microhistory is the view that a definitive conclusion about the above remains elusive⁷ and over time many scholars came to the same conclusion. However, given the uneven universal distribution and application of the

¹ F. Trivellato, 'Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory in the Age of Global History?' eScholarship, California Italian Studies 2, 1 (2011), Abstract, [1–24],

<https://escholarship.org/>, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0z94n9hq>, accessed 14 Aug.

2023; D. Tomich, 'The Order of Historical Time: The Longue Durée and Micro-History', *Almanack*, Guarulhos, n.02 (2011), 52–65, DOI -<http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/2236-463320110204>, (artigos), accessed 7 June 2020.

² S. Debruyne, 'To See the World in a Grain of Sand: An Overview of the Field of Microhistory', (2022), [1–2], https://www.academia.edu/101039774/Historiographical_Overview_of_the_field_of_Microhistory, accessed 20 Aug. 2023.

³ F. Cuevas, 'New paths for Exploiting "History from Below": Microhistorical Documentaries', *Panoptikum*, 29, 36 (2023), 53, <https://doi.org/10.2681/pan.2023.29.03>, https://www.academia.edu/104296191/New_Paths_for_Exploring_History_from_Below_Microhistorical_Documentaries, accessed 14 Aug. 2023.

⁴ J-M. Kuukkanen, 'The Missing Narrativist Turn in the Historiography of Science', *History and Theory*, 51 (Oct. 2012), 340, https://www.academia.edu/12240154/The_Missing_Narrativist_Turn_in_Historiography_of_Science, accessed 21 Aug. 2023.

⁵ G. Levi, 'Biography and Microhistory. Abstract', n.d., [2], <https://www.uv.es/retpb/docs/Florencia/Giovanni%20Levi.pdf>, accessed 20 Aug. 2023.

⁶ M. de Miguel, 'Microhistory. Generic Aspects and Studies on Microhistory'. Translated from: '*La Macrohistoria. Aspectos genéricos y estudios sobre microhistoria*'. (with Academia.edu), n.d., 1–23, <https://www.academia.edu/11196186/Microhistoria>, accessed 10 Sep. 2023.

⁷ H. Renders and D. Veltman, 'Dossier on Microhistory', in H. Renders and D. Veltman, eds., *Fear of Theory. Towards a New Justification of Biography* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2021), 189.

microhistorical method,⁸ the wide range of the diverse debates about, but also within microhistory, are hardly surprising. Not only diverse debates but also the breadth of applications, contribute to perpetuate these debates.

As far back as 1991, Giovanni Levi confirmed that ‘the debate over microhistory has not been based on theoretical texts or manifestos. [...] Microhistory, in common with all experimental work, has no body of established orthodoxy to draw on.’⁹ It is not surprising that some scholars still find too much methodology-talk in and about microhistory. Microhistorians have only themselves to blame, that is, if one prefers to have a more unified scholarly body of thought about microhistory.

On the one hand South African historian Nigel Worden suggests that ‘microhistorians need to be more aware of what their work illuminates’.¹⁰ On the other, Andrew C. Thompson found that in all his readings, he ‘never came across a historian who was unsure of how he or she defines microhistory.’¹¹ For Albert Grundlingh, ‘microhistory [...] shuns elite consciousness.’¹² Parenthetically, when Russel S. Viljoen referred in 2003¹³ to Nigel Penn’s *Rogues, Rebels and Runaways* (1999) and if Viljoen’s determination of Jan Paerl and that of

⁸ M. Hård, ed., *Microhistories of Technology. Making the World*, (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), 8.

⁹ G. Levi, ‘On Microhistory’ from P. Burke *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 93.

¹⁰ N. Worden, ‘After Race and Class: Recent Trends in the Historiography of Early Modern Cape Society’, *South African Historical Journal*, 62, 3 (2010), 589, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233280370_After_Race_and_Class_Recent_Trends_in_the_Historiography_of_Early_Colonial_Cape_Society/link/53f47a900cf2888a7490fe9e/download, accessed 14 Sep. 2023.

¹¹ A.C. Thompson, ‘Conrad Eymann: A Microhistory of Changing German-Canadian Identity During the First World War’ (MA thesis, Graduate College of Bowling Green State University, Aug. 2010), 4, https://etd.ohiolink.edu/apexprod/rws_etd/send_file/send?accession=bgsu1276989758&disposition=inline, accessed 26 June 2023.

¹² A. Grundlingh, POEM: ‘Some Trends in South African Academic History: Changing Contexts and Challenges’, *Rozenberg Quarterly, The Magazine*, (2005), [8], <http://rozenbergquarterly.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/VUCover.jpg>, accessed 18 Apr. 2023.

¹³ R.S. Viljoen, ‘Land of our Forefathers’: Jan Paerl: A Khoikhoi Prophet in Cape Colonial Society 1761-1851’ (PhD thesis, University of Leiden, 2003), 3.

the Khoikhoi peoples which he again repeated in 2023 is considered, then it is reasonable to conclude that Viljoen is clear about what the work of microhistorians illuminate.

Regardless of these diverse views, this study supports the notion that scholarly diversity stimulates fertile intellectual debate, also for Microhistory 2.0, if I borrow this term from István M. Szijártó.¹⁴ It is possible to embrace such scholarly diversity without necessarily having to accept intellectual relativism.

In an attempt to arrive at a conceptual framework for interpreting Viljoen's views, the *purpose* of this article is to constructively unpack the introduction, 'Microhistory and Reclaiming Histories of the Modest'¹⁵ of Viljoen's book.

For the requirements of this study a conceptual framework is reduced to an simplistic understanding of the links that exist between different concepts, for instance, emotional community, colonial project, lost history, or the notion of an 'uncertainty gap'. History is also about interpreting linkages as conceptual frames. Neither is so watertight that one can claim that absolute reign – at least not in any form of understanding the human past.

This is not a book review of *Khoikhoi, Microhistory and Colonial Characters*. Instead, the *objective* is to identify the key observations – markers – are probably more appropriate alternatives which Viljoen used to express his views. A secondary objective is to constructively include the *reasons* for his views and the possible *implications* that flow from them.

The approach is therefore qualitative in research method and figuratively speaking, a 'focus group discussion', that is, if one allows the sources to 'talk to one another.' The value of this approach lies in the flexibility, and as an effective method to identify the most

¹⁴ I.M. Szijártó, 'The Paths of Microhistory', *Forum: Microstoria e Storia Globale* (3), *Quaderni Storici*, 159 / a. LIII, n. 3 (dicembre 2018), 925–6.

¹⁵ R. Viljoen, 'Microhistory and Reclaiming Histories of the Modest', in R. Viljoen, *Khoikhoi, Microhistory and Colonial Characters at the Cape of Good Hope* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2023), 1–15.

meaningful issues.¹⁶ This is done against the background of a central idea of historicism, in that literary (internal) criticism is ‘a historical as well as a literary exercise’.¹⁷

The above approach places this study at variance with Zoltán B. Simon who found too much methodology-talk in microhistory and too little investment in experimental research.¹⁸ More than a decade earlier, Ginzburg expressed similar sentiments that there was a tendency in Italy to rather discuss labels than conducting real historical research.¹⁹ The position in this research is that new intellectual directions need expansive methodological development and that more methodology-talk is required.

This article includes (in section two) references made by a number of randomly chosen South African scholars about microhistory. This is neither a quantitative approach nor a conclusive study to strive for statistical representativity within the larger community of historians in South Africa. The idea is to establish *who* said *what* and not to determine *why* they said this or that, or *what* the implications are or might be. Having established a base to work from, the advantage of this method should enable an array of future debates.

Section three places ‘Microhistory and Reclaiming Histories’ under scrutiny in three subsections. The first subsection attends to the background, purpose and objective for this study. The second subsection establishes justifications and concludes with three views about

¹⁶ S. Sofaer, ‘Qualitative Research Methods’, *International Journal for Quality in Health Care*, 14, 4 (2002), 330, https://www.academia.edu/79338966/Qualitative_research_methods, accessed 13 Sep. 2023.

¹⁷ D.R. Woolf, Book Reviews / Comptes rendus, of: A.F. Kinney and D.S. Collins, eds., *Renaissance Historicism. Selections from English Literature Renaissance* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), 411, *Renaissance and Reformation*, (2009), 315, ([Toronto]:University of Toronto Libraries – UOTL), https://www.academia.edu/102544680/Renaissance_Historicism_Selections_from_English_Literary_Renaissance, accessed 10 Sep. 2023.

¹⁸ Z.B. Simon, ‘Method and Perspective’, *Journal of Microhistory* (2009), 2–3. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/5643196431>, accessed 1 June 2022.

¹⁹ P.J. Anttonen, ‘Of Microhistory, Mentalities and Other “Unnecessary” Labels – An Interview with Carlo Ginzburg’, *Suomen Anthropologi*, 1 (1995), 36, https://www.academia.edu/78148671/Of_Microhistory_Mentalities_and_Other_Unnecessary_Labels_An_Interview_with_Carlo_Ginzburg, accessed 24 Sep. 2023.

the suitability of the methodological approach. The third subsection attempts to answer the question: What are the capacities of microhistory in this instance.

The fourth and last section narrows the scale of observation in order to focus on only two themes in Viljoen's microhistory: The question of power by building on aspects of Michel Foucault's ideas about power, and the emotions in history relying on the work of Sigurður G. Magnússon.

2. Some references to 'microhistory' in South African historiography

Human activities take place in particular historical contexts and try as historians may to rise above these external contextual influences around them, none has truly overcome two limitations: the negation of context, and the achievement of objective (an unpopular term and unrealistic aim). The achievement of absolute objective research outcomes remain elusive. These limitations persist as historians' burdens. And yet, ignoring context, or not striving for objectivity, would be scientific oversights, regardless of whether one accepts history as a science or not.

The decade after 1994 saw numerous publications with new evaluations and interpretations about the status and potential futures of South African historiography.²⁰ One of

²⁰ See for instance, C. Saunders, 'Four Decades of South African Academic Historical Writing. A Personal Perspective', in H.E. Stolten, ed., *History Making and Present Day Politics. The Meaning of Collective Memory in South Africa* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrika-institutet 2007); H.E. Stolten, 'History in the New South Africa. An Introduction', in H.E. Stolten, ed., *History Making and Present Day Politics.*; B.M. Magubane, 'Whose Memory – Whose History? The Illusion of Liberal and Radical Debates', in H.E. Stolten, ed., *Making History and Present Day Politics*; J. Wassermann, 'The Historical Consciousness of Afrikaner Adolescents – A Small Scale Survey', *Yesterday and Today*, 1 (2007); <http://sashtw.org.za/WP/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Johann%20Wasserman%20groter%20referaat.pdf>, accessed 5 Mar. 2019; J. Wassermann, 'Identity Politics and Being a Free Stater During the South African War (1899–1902): A Micro-history of the Inhabitants of the Greater Drakensberg Region', *New Contree*, 76, supplement edition (Nov. 2016); https://newcontreejournal.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/NC76_J-Wassermann.pdf, accessed 29 May 2022; J. Wassermann, 'Spirituality and the Memorialisation of the Dead of the Durban Concentration Camps During the South African War (1899–1902) – A Micro History', *Pharos Journal of Theology*, ISSN 2414 online 102,

the themes which Grundlingh discussed a few years ago is the idea of an ‘authentic “*African voice*”’.²¹ According to him there were real dangers

that voices of the periphery may well be drowned out by the cacophony of such an overriding discourse. The importance of submerged voices has recently been illustrated by the *micro-history* of the trials and tribulations of Nontetha Nkwenkwe, a prophetess from the Eastern Cape during the 1920s and 1930s.²²

This is only a scant reference to microhistory in respect of the *praxis* of microhistory.

In 2007 Shamil Jeppie published a history of the Arabic Study Circle founded in the 1950s in Durban (today, eThekweni Municipality). This organisation was established as an association of literate men who promoted the history of Islam, its language and religion through well-defined goals and a programme of action.²³ Jeppie explains:

While the working classes, to an extent, have been viewed as worthy subjects for such ‘*micro-histories*’, there is every reason for the completely under-studied middle classes of all ethnic and linguistic backgrounds to begin to gain the attention of historians. There are very few textured, intimate and detailed studies of this stratum among South African communities through *microhistory*.

Here then are the beginnings of a *micro-history* of a middle-class community through a study of an ‘Indian’ Muslim association. Focusing on an organisation fulfils three objectives: we learn about a whole subculture of ‘little’ organisations, each with its own peculiarities, in a minority situation; we learn also of extended conflicts over doctrine, sometimes intricate and obscure, often expressed noisily in the public sphere in ‘pamphlet wars’ between opposing parties; and we learn about hybrid organisational methods, often mixing modernist forms and particularistic sympathies. Such phenomena, however, express something of the ethos and practices of civil society among South Africa’s communities, not only its religious minorities.²⁴

One of the early successful initiatives of the Circle was the sponsorship of an annual speech opportunity for male and female students.²⁵ Unfortunately Jeppie made no further references to microhistory or its practitioners in the rest of his book.

special edition, 1 (2021), 1–11,

https://www.pharosjot.com/uploads/7/1/6/3/7163688/theme_5_article_18_se1_2021_wassermann_spirituality_and_the_memorialisation.pdf, accessed 29 May 2022.

²¹ A. Grundlingh, POEM: ‘Some Trends in South African Academic History’ [8].

²² Ibid. (Emphasis added.)

²³ S. Jeppie, *Language Identity Modernity. The Arabic Study Circle of Durban* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007), 3.

²⁴ Ibid., 9. (Emphasis added.)

²⁵ J.C. Armstrong, ‘Inscribing a Circle’, Book review of: S. Jeppie *Language Identity Modernity. The Arabic Study Circle of Durban* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007), H-SAfrica (May 2008), n.p., <https://networks.h.net.org/node/10670/reviews/11185/Armstrong-jeppie>, accessed 29 Sep. 2023.

The only reference to the prefix ‘micro’ by Hans E. Stolten in his book *History Making and Present Day Politics* is the argument that South Africa ‘is a microcosmos that serves to illustrate many of the global problems we all face.’²⁶ If Stolten is correct, the world faces a bleak future. However, in the same book Bernhard M. Magubane quoted Perry Anderson who wrote ‘[t]hat the miniature scale of primitive societies...made them exceptionally propitious for microanalysis....’²⁷ But the implication is that microanalysis does not necessarily equate to microhistories. Christopher Saunders’s view in his chapter contribution to Stolten’s book is that the early 1980s experienced the most fundamental shift to social history with Charles van Onselen’s *New Babylon* and *New Nineveh* ‘linked the micro with the macro and the social with the political and economic,’²⁸ as an example. Also in 2007, Worden referenced Nigel Penn’s work as being micronarrative in style for which he became ‘famous among South Africanists’.²⁹ Similarly, Viljoen referenced credited Penn a few years earlier (in 2003) soon after *Rogues, Rebels and Runaways* was published in 1999.

Two years after *History Making and Present Day Politics*, Richard Ross explained that the historiography of the period 1500–1800, ‘celebrated European colonization’³⁰ but since then, ‘the strength of such work has been in reconstructing *microhistories*, which [...] await full

²⁶ H.E. Stolten, ‘History in the New South Africa. An Introduction’, in H.E. Stolten, ed., *History Making and Present Day Politics. The Meaning of Collective Memory in South Africa* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrika-institutet 2007), 5.

²⁷ B.M. Magubane, ‘Whose Memory – Whose History? The Illusion of Liberal and Radical Debates’, in H.E. Stolten, ed., *Making History and Present Day Politics*, 262.

²⁸ C. Saunders, ‘Four Decades of South African Academic Historical Writing. A Personal Perspective’, in H.E. Stolten, ed., *Making History and Present Day Politics*, 285.

²⁹ N. Worden, ‘New Approaches to VOC History in South Africa’, *South African Historical Journal*, 59 (2007), 15, https://www.academia.edu/4333987/New_Approaches_to_VOC_History_in_South_Africa, accessed 9 Apr. 2023.

³⁰ R. Ross, ‘Khoesan and Immigrants: The Emergence of Colonial Society in the Cape, 1500–1800’, in C. Hamilton, B.K. Mbenga and R. Ross, *The Cambridge History of South Africa, Vol. I, From Early Times to 1885*, Published online by Cambridge University Press, (28 Sep. 2010), 168, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521517942.005>, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/abs/cambridge-history-of-south-africa/khoesan-and-immigrants-the-emergence-of-colonial-society-in-the-cape-15001800/9F5D308EC51BC8D1E846C0C9BE9D95BF>, accessed 29 Aug. 2023.

incorporation of Cape society’.³¹ At the same time Worden raised ‘a more fundamental methodological issue, of *how*, or *if*, historians should transcend the micro-narratives so beloved of cultural historians (certainly many of those working on the Cape, although few do so in a strictly Ginzburgian sense).’³² Ross’s point was that the value of microhistories that reconstruct and incorporate slave communities into Cape society, needs to be considered as a whole³³ hence Viljoen’s aim to have Khoikhoi studies integrated into ‘South Africa’s national narrative and historiography’.³⁴ Viljoen therefore agrees with Worden who wrote that ‘[w]e do not need to abandon our commitment to South African realities.’³⁵

Soon after Gillian Turner and Lizette Rabe wrote that microhistory was not a familiar field of study in South Africa;³⁶ that their study-object (a community media journalist, Heather Brenner) was ideally suited ‘to be analysed within the tenets of microhistory’;³⁷ that they could study the person³⁸ behind her unheard voice,³⁹ and that they found ‘[m]icrohistory [...] useful in recording the contribution in various fields by those who are “other” than male or white.’⁴⁰ Following June Sochen, Rabe repeated this point in 2010.⁴¹ It is questionable if the converse would be acceptable science. And whether ‘[m]icrohistory can [...] be used as a *typical means* of recording the lives and times of a community’,⁴² is a debatable methodological view. That said, Joanne G. Mc Kim’s book review found Sochen’s *Movers and Shakers* to lack cohesive

³¹ Ibid., 169. (Emphasis added.)

³² N. Worden, ‘After Race and Class’, 595. (Emphasis added.)

³³ Ross, ‘Khoesan and Immigrants’, 169.

³⁴ Viljoen, ‘Microhistory and Reclaiming Histories’, 11.

³⁵ Worden, ‘After Race and Class’, 600.

³⁶ G. Turner and L. Rabe, ‘A Microhistorical Record of “Micromedia”: A Community Media Journalist and her Medium’, *Communitas*, (ISSN 1023-0556), 13 (2008), 58, <https://journals.ufs.ac.za/index.php/com/article/download/932/923/1789>, accessed 24 June 2023.

³⁷ Ibid., 57.

³⁸ Ibid., 58.

³⁹ Ibid., 57.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 58.

⁴¹ L. Rabe, ‘Living History – The Story of Adderley Street’s Flower Sellers’, *South African Journal of Cultural History*, 24, 1 (2010), 88, <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/sajch/article/view/64679>, accessed 20 May 2017.

⁴² Ibid. (Emphasis added.)

in-depth analysis, with discussions that hardly ever reached robust examination of ideas including their theoretical foundations, and with conventionally narrow definitions.⁴³

For Melanie E. Boehi the argument is that although Cape Town's flower sellers have been described as having a tradition, they had no history.⁴⁴ This article argues that it is probably more accurate to suggest that they had no *written* history. Despite the reality of a long trading history since the 1880s, little *written* is known about their history. Nevertheless, the Cape flower sellers were not considered (thus not respected) as independent business people.⁴⁵

Two studies by Johan Wassermann also applied the microhistorical method. In his microhistorical study about identity politics of a 'neglected aspect of Free State regional history',⁴⁶ he argued how 'identity politics transcended the transitional border of the Drakensberg' and how 'constructed rationally and contextually were [...] systematically replaced'⁴⁷ from above, meaning, by government authorities at the time. In his second microhistorical study, he identified four distinct memorialisation events, each with its own visible and invisible 'forms of spirituality and understanding'.⁴⁸ In a way, Wassermann made use of the microhistorical method to answer large questions regarding small spaces. In his view, large questions in small spaces enabled him 'to understand the agency of the memorialisers'.⁴⁹

⁴³ J.G. Mc Kim, book review of: June Sochen, *Movers and Shakers: American Women Thinkers And Activists, 1900-1970* (New York: Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Co., 1973, (1975), *Indiana Magazine of History*, 284–285, <https://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/imh/article/view/9873/13458>, accessed 29 Aug. 2023.

⁴⁴ M.E. Boehi, 'Being/becoming the "Cape Town Flower Sellers."' *The Botanical Complex and Floricultures in Cape Town* (MA mini-thesis, Public and Visual History, University of the Western Cape, Dec. 2010), vi, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/58913808.pdf>, accessed 26 May 2023. (Emphasis added.)

⁴⁵ M.E. Boehi, 'The Flower Sellers of Cape Town. A History', *Veld and Flora*, (Sep. 2013), 132–4, https://www.academia.edu/5329514/The_Flower_Sellers_of_Cape_Town_A_History, accessed 29 May 2023.

⁴⁶ J. Wassermann, 'Identity Politics and Being a Free Stater During the South African War', 98.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁴⁸ J. Wassermann, 'Spirituality and the Memorialisation of the Dead', 1.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

In 2019 Robert B. Uys confirmed in his MA study that through the application of the microhistorical method, subaltern voices were made known⁵⁰ – a point which Ginzburg made in the ‘Preface to the Italian Edition’⁵¹ of 1976. Uys argued that the historian, Gustav Preller, used oral accounts of individuals who can be considered as unimportant people, not with the aim to arrive at microhistories of the subaltern, but rather as ‘a collection of “Voortrekker” micro-histories into the beginnings of the formation of a nation’.⁵²

The application of the microhistorical method in another MA study enabled Sophia M. Ferguson to research the dynamics of place and space, in Voortrekker Road (at the outskirts of Cape Town), were interconnected microhistories that play themselves out on a daily basis in the form of fractured negotiations not only along Voortrekker Road as an entangled site, but also in the larger context of South Africa as a transitional society.⁵³

In Anschen Conradie’s review (2023) of Joan Kruger’s biography-in-context, she explained that the author ‘weaved a *microhistory* around this historical figure. However, it is not just Marie/Maria’s history, it is also an elegy of women of her time, the voiceless, who, despite their unique challenges, are recorded in the annals’. According to Conradie, it is a book ‘that gives a voice to the otherwise invisible’ that includes ‘sharp social commentary’.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ R.B. Uys, ‘The Lives and Deaths of Memorials: The Changing Symbolism of the 1938 Voortrekker Centenary Monuments’ (MA mini-thesis, University of the Western Cape, Belville, Mar. 2019), 25, <http://etd.uwc.ac.za/xmlui/handle/11394/6954>, accessed 14 Apr. 2023.

⁵¹ C. Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms. The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* translated by John and Anne C. Tedeschi, with a new preface (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), xxi–xxiii.

⁵² Uys, ‘The Lives and Deaths of Memorials’, 25.

⁵³ S.M. Ferguson, ‘Voortrekker Road Palimpsest: A Study in Social, Spatial and Temporal Flux in the City’ (MA thesis, Department of History, University of the Western Cape, Belville, 14 Oct. 2019), 1, https://etd.uwc.ac.za/xmlui/bitstream/handle/11394/7237/ferguson_m_arts_2020.pdf?sequence=5&isAllowed=y, accessed 31 Aug. 2023.

⁵⁴ A. Conradie, ‘Cradle – Joan Kruger’, leesD!T, #Uitdieperdsebek, (1 Sep. 2023), n.p., https://web.facebook.com/hashtag/uitdieperdsebek?_rdc=1&_rdr, accessed 27 Sep. 2023.

Against the above, Viljoen's view (in 2023) that 'microhistory is not new to South African historiography',⁵⁵ is similar to Rabe's similar view in 2010,⁵⁶ and that of Turner and Rabe in 2008.⁵⁷

If the information in this section are considered as some historiographical 'facts of the matter', then the following question: What does Viljoen seek to achieve can be answered with the help of four quotations from 'Microhistory and Reclaiming'. Viljoen wrote that his study 'study [...] seeks to recover a critical period of change and adjustment in Khoikhoi society and uncover the extent to which the colonial project imposed itself on the lives of ordinary Khoikhoi men and women....'⁵⁸ Then 'the book tracked and traced the existence, livelihood [...] of ordinary Khoikhoi individuals of modest status [...] within a particular colonial context and a set of personal circumstances.'⁵⁹ Viljoen suggests that the 'book must be read against the backdrop of a colonial society and individuals subjected to change triggered by unpredictable human behavior, shifting material circumstances and differing social contexts.'⁶⁰ Lastly, between the 'future and potential of microhistories in the historiography of the early Cape [...] *South African historians only scratched the surface as far as microhistory is concerned*, this book seeks to fill that gap in South African historiography'.⁶¹ Joan Kruger's *Wieg. Die Verhaal van Maria du Plessis* does the same but at the intersection between microhistory, context and the notion of biography-in-context⁶² as discussed above.

When these observations are considered together, they go a long way to contribute to a short simplistic operational definition of microhistory. Artur Ribeiro's 'understanding

⁵⁵ Viljoen, 'Microhistory and Reclaiming Histories', 4.

⁵⁶ L. Rabe, 'Living History – The Story of Adderley Street's Flower Sellers', *South African Journal of Cultural History*, 24, 1 (2010), 86.

⁵⁷ Turner and Rabe, 'A Microhistorical Record of "Micromedia"'.
⁵⁸ Viljoen, 'Microhistory and Reclaiming Histories', 1–2.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 3.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 3.

⁶¹ Ibid., 5. (Emphasis added.)

⁶² J. Kruger, *Wieg. Die Verhaal van Maria du Plessis*, 5. (Emphasis added.)

⁶² J. Kruger, *Wieg. Die Verhaal van Maria du Plessis, neé Marie Buisset (1679–1751), Hugenoot en Vroedvrouw* (Somerset-Wes: Litera Publikasies, 2022).

microhistory as the reconstruction of the life of agents, small-scale case studies that serve as exemplars of large-scale phenomena,⁶³ supports this view. Therefore, having established what Viljoen achieved, one can enter into a more specific relook at Viljoen's introduction.

In a different but relevant context, Michel Foucault argued that 'the reader [...] is, of course, free to make what he [she] will of the book he [she] has been kind enough to read.'⁶⁴ But Edward H. Carr advised more than six decades ago against such views,⁶⁵ a view that is still valued today and tends to keep interpretive relativism at bay.

3. A closer look at 'Microhistory and Reclaiming Histories'

3.1 The *background, purpose* and *objective*

Viljoen's outline of the political and economic colonial project assists to explain what he means by 'a new historical narrative of Khoikhoi individuals in Cape VOC world'⁶⁶ within the *background* of that particular historical context.

As mentioned earlier, this article only attends to two themes: colonial power along the lines of Michel Foucault's thinking about power, and history of emotions along the lines of Sigurður G. Magnússon's thinking about emotions. By looking more closely at these two variables, implies that it is possible to 'trace an analytical and methodological dialogue between spaces and the microhistorical approach'.⁶⁷ This view extends the debate beyond a micro-analysis of space, although such study has merit on its own.

⁶³ A. Ribeiro, 'Microhistory and Archaeology: Some Comment and Contributions', (Research paper, pia). Papers from the Institute of Archaeology, 28, 1 (2019), 1, DOI: 10.14324/111.2041-9015.00. https://www.academia.edu/39431622/Microhistory_and_Archaeology_Some_comments_and_contributions, accessed 15 Sep. 2022.

⁶⁴ M. Foucault, *The Order of Things. The Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2002), ix.

⁶⁵ E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974), 16.

⁶⁶ Ribeiro, 'Microhistory and Archaeology', 1.

⁶⁷ F.W.C. Filho, 'Space and Micro-history: A Dialogical Relationship'. Translated from *Espaço E Micro-história: Uma Relação Dialógica Revista Espacialidades*, 19, 1, (junho de 2023),

These are important theoretical inclusions in microhistorical *praxis*, similar to what Wassermann termed as his theoretical and methodological ‘anchors’⁶⁸ which he employed in his study about spirituality and memorialisation. The reasons are that they add *more* and *not less*, to existing frequently criticised ‘methodology-talk’ in microhistory. More methodology-talk makes the theoretical and methodological anchors important because they counter much of the criticisms directed at microhistory’s apparent lack of theoretical underpinnings.

In order to keep to the intentions of this article, two important observations stand out: firstly, that the *purpose* of Viljoen’s book ‘unapologetically promotes microhistory and its methodology’⁶⁹ because he ‘acknowledges the work produced thus far, and seeks to add to an existing body of work....’⁷⁰ As a result, the view in this article is that Viljoen’s research is hypothesis confirming in nature. This ‘announcement’ by Viljoen is of long-term significance for South African historiography because it again adds his voice to previous similar voices as discussed in section two.

The second observation is that ‘*the objective of microhistory must be to provide a platform in order to navigate a seamless incorporation of Khoikhoi studies into South Africa’s national narrative and historiography.*’⁷¹ This observation is of immediate-term importance for Khoikhoi studies within the larger national and international history narratives. The reason is because they aim to rescue⁷² lost histories. In a sense microhistory is not just a history of the insignificant small, unobtrusive phenomena.⁷³ And this suggests where Khoikhoi history belongs: high up on the planned research projects of scholars.

51–73, [1], doi:10.21680/1984-817X.2023v19n1ID30372, <https://periodicos.ufrn.br/espacialidades/citationstylelanguage/get/modern-language-association?submissionId=30372&publicationId=34388>, accessed 10 Sep. 2023.

⁶⁸ J. Wassermann, ‘Spirituality and the Memorialisation of the Dead’, 3.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 4.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 6.

⁷¹ Ibid., 11. (Emphasis added.)

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ C. West, ‘Visions in a Ninth-Century Village: An Early Medieval Microhistory’, *History Workshop Journal*, 81, 1 Spring (2015), 1, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbv040>, accessed 29 May 2022.

A few provisional observations regarding the notion of ‘lost’ people or histories, are in place. Although *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe* need no introduction, Georg G. Iggers’ observation that individuals who must not be lost ‘either within world historical processes or in anonymous crowds’ needs to be rescued from the unknown. The second observation is that in order to do so, a new conceptual and methodological approach to history is called for.⁷⁴ The Khoikhoi have lost their individualities to a new culture or future cultures.

Statements about the above are not sufficient and need to be justified (in section 3.2). The third observation is that Iggers explained how the small unit of investigation of a peasant or cottage industry supplied stock to the increased demands for textiles, how it lead to early forms of industrialisation, increased population, earlier marriages, more children, and having to meet greater labor demands.⁷⁵ This example can be compared to the situation of the Khoikhoi on and off the farms: the Khoikhoi supplied meat and labour, stimulated capitalist production, consumption, and expansion into the inland of South Africa. I borrow the argument that ‘the interplay of economic forces and regenerative practices’ of the cottage industries⁷⁶ from Iggers and suggest that this is equitable to the master-Khoikhoi relationships of the farms that eventually can be used to interpret the sources as evidence of social inequality.⁷⁷ The reality is that all forms of inequality is only one of the tendencies of interest in history that is beyond that of academia, and a second is the ‘desire to overcome the theoretical polarization’ in the ‘ways in which both historians and others relate to the past’.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ G.G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century. From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1997), 103.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 105.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ J. Beck and C.P. Quinn, ‘Balancing the Scales: Archaeological Approaches to Social Inequality’, *World Archaeology*, (2023), 2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00438243.2023.2169314>, accessed 7 Sep. 2023.

⁷⁸ H. Paul, ‘Relations to the Past: A Research Agenda for Historical Theorists’, *Rethinking History*, 19 (2015), 1, https://www.academia.edu/7475996/Relations_to_the_past_a_research_agenda_for_historical_theorists, accessed 10 Oct. 2023.

3.2 Some justifications established

More than two decades ago, István M. Szijártó formulated four arguments for microhistory. They also serve as the entry point for this section but more importantly, collectively, they link the local with the larger world – the micro with the macro, and thus is an important first justification of this study. Szijártó wrote:

I try to give four arguments for micro-orientated social history. I think that it has a clear advantage over macro-oriented traditional social history owing to its four characteristics. It is *appealing* to the general public, it is *realistic*, it conveys *personal experience* and whatever it has in its focus, the *lines branching out from this reach very far*.⁷⁹

Of particular relevance is the next argument – the lines which branch out from this research, reach out far. A few implications from this argument need consideration.

Inherent in the principle of historical diversity of study-objects, the intention to describe, is its focus. The implication is that the relative size is not the determining characteristic of microhistory, but rather the depth of investigation. The lines reaching out from the first three arguments when taken collectively, have far-reaching scope and relevance, particularly when it comes to promote and accommodate diverse historical interpretations, methodologies and study-objects. This is an open-ended view which Szijártó later repeated (and defended) as: there are other interpretations as well. They can be considered as attention markers.

Two such justifications are the belief that *undeniable* (they cannot be wished away) stories *can* (it is possible) be told.⁸⁰ *Khoikoi, Microhistory and Colonial Characters*⁸¹ substantiates both justifications by overcoming apparent research impossibilities and insurmountabilities that stand in the way of increased focus on Khoikhoi studies, and microhistory in general. With the benefit of historical hindsight, one can argue that it is not

⁷⁹ I.M. Szijártó, 'Four Arguments for Microhistory', *Rethinking History*, MINIATURES, 6, 2 (2002), 209, <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals>. DOI: 10.1080/13642520210145644, accessed 24 Jan. 2017. (Emphasis added.)

⁸⁰ Viljoen, 'Microhistory and Reclaiming Histories', 1.

⁸¹ Viljoen, *Khoikhoi, Microhistory and Colonial Characters*, 1–15.

only a moral obligation but also a scientific necessity to treat *all* histories (past, present and future) of *all* South Africans with *equal respect* and hence, *must* be (re-)written accordingly. This is an incongruency that scholars of the victors cannot withstand.

The above four concepts – *undeniable* stories, *can* be told, is a *moral obligation*, and *scientific necessity* – can be supported by a growing list of observations from South African scholars who apply the microhistorical method (and language) to yield successful research outcomes as already shown. Testimonies by scholars about their successful research outcomes are further justifications to study lost histories. Walter Benjamin wrote (in 1940) in his third thesis ‘On the Concept of History’, ‘that nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history.’⁸² This important statement also appears quite often in Ginzburg’s written work.

For many years, historians advocated that they have shifted their focus away from ‘Big Man/Woman history’ and ‘history of the victors’. The implication is that there is also an ethical scholarly reality that compels historians to historical commitment of lost histories. One cannot just return artifacts of colonially acquired material goods to the countries of origin. Such noble ‘give-back’ efforts by mother countries need to include *returning* lost histories as well, often described as previously ‘ignored’, ‘slurred over’⁸³ or as ‘invisibilised histories’.

To take the argument a step further, this article promotes the notion that ‘lost histories’ could be elevated to an analytical category with interpretive strategies of a specific kind among the already existing microhistorical methodologies. These two points are further *a-priori* justifications for recovering silenced histories, all of which have been part of the diverse debates about microhistory ever since their arrival in microhistory of the mid-1970s.

⁸² W. Benjamin, ‘On the Concept of History’, (1940), 2, https://www.sfu.ca/~andrewf/books/Concept_History_Benjamin.pdf, accessed 16 Aug. 2023.

⁸³ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), 13.

Two references to the early days of the mid-1970s seem appropriate. Originally published in 1975, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie wrote about the lack of material concerning the ‘direct testimony of peasants’ but how ‘an extraordinary detailed and vivid picture of their everyday life’,⁸⁴ were used to analyse the demographic composition, behaviour, and the social mentality of a peasant community. This was told in much the same way as Viljoen now proposes. Ginzburg also wrote about the 1976 Italian edition of *The Cheese and the Worms* that ‘[m]ore and more [historians] are turning toward what their predecessors passed over in silence, discarded, or simply ignored’⁸⁵ – a view that reverberates well into current microhistorical justifications and practise in South Africa.

Justifying the above is based on the view that Viljoen’s geo-political study areas were inhabited by the Khoisan ‘for centuries’.⁸⁶ Unasked for, the Khoikhoi’s traditional herder existences in macro spaces changed from above, meaning ‘imposed’⁸⁷ on them as they were ‘absorbed’ or integrated⁸⁸ into a farm servant⁸⁹ existence located in, and often confined to, ‘micro spaces’ of ‘small-scale settings’.⁹⁰ The result was that the Khoikhoi existence changed fundamentally into ‘an existence very different from their forebears not as pastoralists or hunter-gatherers, but as farm servants’⁹¹ as subjugated communities. Overnight ‘[s]ettler cohesion and racial stratification’⁹² became new micro-sociopolitical phenomena in a much reshaped web of life not seen or experienced before in South Africa.

⁸⁴ E. Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou. The Promised Land of Error*, translated by Barbara Bray (New York: George Braziller: 1978), vii.

⁸⁵ Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, xxi.

⁸⁶ Viljoen, ‘Microhistory and Reclaiming Histories’, 2. See also R. Elphick ‘The Khoisan to c. 1770’, in R. Elphick and H. Giliomee, *The Shaping of South African Society, 1652–1820* second impression (Cape Town: Longmans Penguin Southern Africa, 1980), 3.

⁸⁷ Viljoen, ‘Microhistory and Reclaiming Histories’, 2.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 1, 2.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*, 4.

If the reclaiming potential of microhistories⁹³ are located in the research processes of reconstructing lost stories in the form of *microstories*, then it is justified to ‘further challenge historians to explore the possibilities and new insights, which microhistory has to offer’ [and to] ‘advocate for a full inclusion of microhistory into the South African historical narrative’.⁹⁴

This article interprets such calls as justifications why formal microhistory courses should be included in History syllabi. In fact, this article argues that microhistory could stand independent as an autonomous field of study next to, for example, economic history, microbiology, microeconomics, microclimatology or microarchitecture. If there can be scholarly autonomous macro-‘somethings’ (e.g. macro analysts, macro-photographers or macroclimatologists), then there is no reason why there cannot also be micro-‘somethings’ such as microanatomy, microculture or microhistory as autonomous fields of study. The mere fact that microhistory, now almost fifty years in practice are still not an autonomous field of historical study, seems precarious. This links voices from South Africa to that of the Global South and beyond.

But there are more futures to consider. The reclaiming capacity through microhistory of lost histories is strengthened by the availability of new credible sources as Ginzburg once cautioned about apparent insignificant sources. This is an important justification for microhistory as an appropriate approach to study the *pasts*. Credible available sources make it possible to arrive at new avenues, meaning new *approaches* and methods and the microhistorical method makes it a practical approach. Since the historical narrative is the author’s own creation with a level of an ‘open-ended perception of history’,⁹⁵ Szijártó reminded readers that there are also other interpretations.⁹⁶ Viljoen supports this line of thinking when he

⁹³ Ibid., 5.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 10.

⁹⁶ Szijártó, ‘Four Arguments for Microhistory’, 209.

wrote about ‘an alternative perspective of South Africa’s colonial past.’⁹⁷ Justifications and capacities are closely connected – they are symbiotic in nature and not mutually exclusive.

3.3 What are the capacities of microhistory?

From Szijártó’s four arguments for microhistory in the beginning of section 3.2, it follows that microhistory has the capacity to fill the gaps in historical narratives which general history inherently leaves behind. This is not surprising or wrong, because general history is not designed for narrative detail in the same way microhistories or archaeological studies are.

Neither does it seek out such detail. For instance, Elizabeth S. Cohen made it clear that

[n]o one story, any more than an exemplary anecdote, will represent in all respects a class of historical phenomena. [...] The contradictions inherent in human relationships and embedded in the cultures that gave them form emerge from such *microhistories* and make them a valuable complement to other modes of historical inquiry.’⁹⁸

The above situation is complex as illustrated during a conversation with Marek Tamm. Eelco Runia summarised his views about this complexity as follows: ‘the business of translating experiences into an appealing story [is] messy’.⁹⁹ If one takes a clue from a near-discipline to microhistory, archaeology, for instance, then comparative approaches to ‘key tenets, assumptions and even the aims of extant, long-held approaches’,¹⁰⁰ warrant re-tinking.

This section’s departure point stems from two comments that serve as background for this subsection. The first comment is Francesca Trivellato’s introductory observation that

[a]t first sight, global history and *microhistory* have little in common [...] But in the past two decades a host of scholars have written *microhistorically* inflected studies of men and women whose lives transcended narrowly bounded geographical, religious, and linguistic areas.’¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Viljoen, ‘Microhistory and Reclaiming Histories’, 10.

⁹⁸ E.S. Cohen, ‘Miscarriages of Apothecary justice: Un-separate Spaces of Work and Family in Early Modern Rome’, *Renaissance Studies*, 21, 4 (2007), 480–1. (Emphasis added.)

⁹⁹ E. Runia and M. Tamm, ‘The Past is not a Foreign Country: A Conversation’, *Rethinking History. The Journal of Theory and Practice*, (May 2017), 2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2019.1587250>, https://www.academia.edu/39042395/The_past_is_not_a_foreign_country_a_conversation_with_Eelco_Runia, accessed 12 Oct. 2023.

¹⁰⁰ G.M. Feinman, ‘Reconceptualizing Archaeological Perspectives on Long-Term Political Change’, *Annual Review of Archaeology*, 52 (2023), 347, [anthro.annualreviews.org, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-060221-114205](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-060221-114205), accessed 27 Oct. 2023.

¹⁰¹ F. Trivellato, ‘Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory in the Age of Global History?’ Abstract.

Anton Froeyman's observation that although '[f]ew developments in the writing of history have had such effect on both the public and professional sphere as microhistory,'¹⁰² it does not receive the full attention and credit it deserves.

The first two capacities of microhistory – that it *can uncover* pasts of individuals and small communities which means that lost histories *can be reclaimed*, were already discussed. What was previously impossible, is now considered possible because the capacities of microhistory are strengthened by new sources and new method/s available also on the strength of its own new theories.¹⁰³ While it is true that previously unavailable documents become available from time to time, it often means that old or existing sources might be interpreted from new *approaches*. In this way, microhistory has the capacity to reveal 'a new historical narrative of Khoikhoi individuals'.¹⁰⁴ At a practical micro-level of analysis, links between different micro- 'personal spaces' in magisterial districts and on loan farms of white households,¹⁰⁵ can be established. Links between these micro spaces to macro- or meta-narratives that connect reciprocal global historical discourses about and by microhistory 2.0, support the argument microhistory has the capacity to be 'a very valuable junior partner in the cooperation with macrohistory' [that] 'can form macro-oriented history too.'¹⁰⁶ In addition, macro-orientated history refers to national history (pre- and post-1994 South African history), and global history. A close look at an earlier article by Szijártó reveals the capacities of microhistory that extends as far as its essence, which are: the microhistorical analysis; interest in general historical questions; the role and position or agency; the possibilities of microhistory

¹⁰² A. Froeyman, 'Layers of Meaning in Microhistory', (Centre for Critical Philosophy, Department of Philosophy and Moral Sciences, Ghent University, Belgium, Blandijnberg 2, 9000 Gent, Belgium) [2012], 1–43, <https://studylib.net/doc/8116382/layers-of-meaning-in-microhistory>, accessed 19 June 2023.

¹⁰³ I.M. Szijártó, 'The Paths of Microhistory', Forum: Microstoria e Storia Globale (3), *Quaderni Storici*, 159 / a. LIII, n. 3 (dicembre 2018), 917.

¹⁰⁴ Viljoen, 'Microhistory and Reclaiming Histories', 1.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 2, 3.

¹⁰⁶ Szijártó, 'The Paths of Microhistory', 923–6.

to contribute to, for instance, global history, gender history and literary history.¹⁰⁷ Based on the essence of microhistory, Szijártó's four arguments for microhistory are still relevant (as quoted in subsection 3.2).

The capacities of microhistory give rise to certain outcomes: the developing or production of diverse 'kinds' or types of *histories*, and to bring to the fore diverse kinds of historical *times*. Different historical times and different histories arrive as a result of research outcomes of different *pasts*, that were once previous presents.

Two decades ago, Michał Leśniewski summarised 'the description of the history of South Africa between 1652 and 1902 [as] conformed to an old pattern' of:

the coming of the Dutch, the expansion of the trekboers to the east of the Cape Colony, relations with the Africans on the eastern frontier, to coming of the British, *difaquane*, the Great Trek and the founding of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, the elimination of independent African chieftainships, the discovery of diamonds and gold, and the British-Boer conflict culminating in the Boer War (1899-1902).¹⁰⁸

From the text of 'Microhistory and Reclaiming Histories' a number of diverse histories are identified. Eduard Muir and Guido Ruggiero treated different themes as 'lost peoples' of Europe, and their 'lost histories' as results of scholarly neglect at some time in the past. These lost histories only survived because of renewed historical effort of re-recording it. In this way 'lost histories' became 'reclaimed histories', meaning histories that were taken back from oblivion and placed into present historiography. In some instances, historical research leads to 'reversed histories' that were changed from their previous historical understandings and misunderstandings, and now presented as 'corrective' histories. 'Stratified histories' stem from

¹⁰⁷ I.M. Szijártó, 'Probing the Limits of Microhistory', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 47, 1 (Jan. 2017), 197, https://www.academia.edu/37875673/Probing_the_Limits_of_Microhistoryhttps://www.academia.edu/37875673/Probing_the_Limits_of_Microhistory, accessed 24 Sep. 2023.

¹⁰⁸ M. Leśniewski, Review of: N. Penn, *The Forgotten Frontier: Colonist and Khoisan on the Cape's Northern Frontier in the 18th Century* (Athens OH, Cape Town: Ohio University Press, Double Storey Books, (2005), (SAR), *Werkwinkel* 4, 1 (2009), 163, https://www.academia.edu/80826493/The_Forgotten_Frontier_Colonist_and_Khoisan_on_the_Capes_Northern_Frontier_in_the_18th_century_Nigel_Penn, accessed 15 Aug. 2023.

history of historical layers, e.g. social, cultural, linguistic, religious or racial considerations. Similarly with ‘intimate histories’ or ‘histories of emotions’. There is a case to be made for ‘modest histories’ as opposed to ‘elite histories’. In ‘hidden histories’ it is possible to consider ‘unrevealed histories’ as purposefully not attended to or ‘lost’ thus ‘invisibilised histories’.

Histories also imply and are imbedded in all sorts of different times: past (colonial society during the eighteenth century), present (today) and future (the next decade) times. As a step into a world of historical times, two recent studies, one by Simon¹⁰⁹ and another by Z.B. Simon and Marek Tamm¹¹⁰ are useful. Simon makes a distinction between eight ‘modalities amongst many why ‘the past matter in social practices and scholarly endeavours.’¹¹¹ A distinction between the present, past and future is worth more ink on paper, because they are linked to the capacities of microhistory.

It appears if it is no longer sensible to talk about, or view the present, as distinct from the past or the future. One such example today is the debate pro or contra modernity, the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene. If the present is merely an ever-changing point in time between past and future histories, and the existence of the web of life is more continuous than changes to dis-continuity, then it suggests that past futures will reflect their footprints of what was previously the present, but is now in the past. In other words, since we are not sure about the futures, the once past futures (meaning the new pasts) will look also different from the way we know them today when it becomes their time to be re-written. For this reason, they need to be reviewed also for the purposes herein.

¹⁰⁹ Z.B. Simon, ‘Does the Past Still Matter?’ in P.M. Dover, ed., *Engaging with the Past and Present: The Relationship Between Past and Present Across the Disciplines* (London and New York: Routledge, 2023), 43–55, https://www.academia.edu/91657029/The_Postcritical_Turn, accessed 16 May 2023.

¹¹⁰ Z.B. Simon and M. Tamm, ‘The Fabric of Historical Time’ (Cambridge, New York, Port Melbourne, New Delhi, Viscount Commercial, Singapore: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 1–18, DOI: 10.1017/9781009103947https://www.academia.edu/105579901/The_Fabric_of_Historical_Time, accessed 15 Aug. 2023.

¹¹¹ Simon, ‘Does the Past Still Matter?’, 52.

One way to review, is to consider Simon's argument about '[t]he idea that we arrive at desired sociopolitical futures through unfolding historical processes, [...] is receding.'¹¹² Simon productively distinguishes between eight 'historically oriented interpretative strategies that invoke the past in making sense of the present and the future.'¹¹³ He lists the following pasts: the unfolding past; the recurring past; the present past; the associated past; the inherited past; the ahistorical past; the remembered past and finally the cultivated past.¹¹⁴ All futures and their pasts are human creations, even the pasts that seem inconsequential are human-made creations and thus possible of reclaiming (not insurmountable) because nothing that happened in history (meaning, none of the above pasts), should be lost for history. This is a normative statement; empirically, it is a different situation. And this study argues that *these* are the reasons why Viljoen wrote that 'the objective of microhistory must be to provide a platform in order to navigate a seamless incorporation of Khoikhoi studies into South Africa's national narrative and historiography'.¹¹⁵ In a sense, this view counters the phenomenon of 'inconsequentiality', the notion of the 'not-importunateness of something or someone.'

A final but under-recognised capacity in this section is based on the application of the comparative historical method for microhistory. One example and a few open-ended questions for future research consideration, are brought forward.

The ever-current transformations in South Africa's national history, including microhistory – under-employed as it might be – means that the comparative historical method can contribute much as *comparative* microhistory about transcultural exchange across diverse geographical spaces in South Africa and elsewhere. This does not exclude comparative microhistory from investigating comparable extraterritorial spaces of similar and dissimilar

¹¹² Ibid., 44.

¹¹³ Ibid., 46.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 47–8.

¹¹⁵ Viljoen, 'Microhistory and Reclaiming Histories', 11.

kinds in the global South. The recent research outcomes by Jess Beck and Colin P. Quinn about social inequality supports this view.¹¹⁶

Diverse spaces in many countries across the world are challenged by microhistorical trends. Such comparative study can be done about the pre- and post-industrial revolutions in their specific countries. Focus on diverse world or sub-world regions can provide detailed and accurate information about the wider debates and intellectual developments in and about the lives of individuals, families, communities and those defined as belonging to the notion of ‘lost histories.’ Different schools of thought yield diverse points of entry in the narrative¹¹⁷ and differences are often found through the comparative historical method that presents unexpected research outcomes.

The necessity for this justification stems from three references to comparison which are found in ‘Microhistory and Reclaiming Histories’. If histories about the fragmentation of Khoikhoi society and their subsequent absorption into Cape-Dutch colonial society as farm servants ‘are to be recorded and retold, it brings to the fore a new historical narrative [...] which is a drastic reversal of fate since the late seventeenth century *compared* to the days of their independence’.¹¹⁸ When contrasted to millenarian thought, stood the Moravian mission and Christianity as a dominant force in the Swellendam district.¹¹⁹ Third, ‘[a]s the Cape inherently degenerated into a violent society characterized by hostile master-servant altercations, acts of criminality and last, murder, the rise of mission Christianity among the Khoikhoi population

¹¹⁶ Beck and Quinn, ‘Balancing the Scales’, 1–12.

¹¹⁷ M. Determann, Book review of: George G. Iggers and Q. Edward Wang, with contributions from Supriya Mukherja (Harlow, England: Pearson Education, 2008), *Journal of World History*, (June 2011), 369–372, https://www.academia.edu/799722/A_Global_History_of_Modern_Historiography_By_George_G_Iggers_and_Q_Edward_Wang_with_contributions_from_Supriya_Mukherjee, 24 Sep. 2023.

¹¹⁸ Viljoen, ‘Microhistory and Reclaiming Histories’, 1, 2. (Emphasis added.)

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 8.

took off towards the end of the eighteenth century.’¹²⁰ Viljoen suggests that conversion to Christianity or baptism was unlikely to solve non-deviant human behaviour.¹²¹

On the basis of the above and with comparative archival sources in mind, projects of comparative microhistory about the ‘lost histories’ are possible. Comparable methods and new avenues are not unrealistic, and new genres in respect of the processes of fragmentation. To absorb societies into a larger explanatory complex can be compared elsewhere. There also other examples of reversals of human fate in the Global South that can be compared?¹²² The suggestion is that daily life in micro-spaces and small-scale settings can serve as fruitful study objects that could lift microhistory and comparative microhistor^{ies}, from their ‘under-explored’ status. The suggestion here is to lean towards productive experiments with comparative microhistorical methods and their subsequent results.

Based on the above justifications and the capacities of microhistory, the next section explores the links between microhistory and power, and the links between microhistory and the history of emotions.

4. Microhistory and colonial power

Michel Foucault argued that old questions that relate to traditional analysis no longer withstand the test of time, and such concepts were therefore displaced and transformed as a result of distinctions between microscopic and macroscopic scales.¹²³ It is more than just the replacement of old questions and concepts with newer ones. It was rather ‘the emergence of a *whole new field of questions*’¹²⁴ that found its way into what he metaphorically described as ‘in

¹²⁰ Ibid., 3.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid., 1.

¹²³ M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, translated by A.M. Sheridan Smith (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2002), 4, 5.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 6. (Emphasis added.)

what way archaeological analysis differs from descriptions of “the history of ideas”’.¹²⁵ It suggests the rearrangement of ‘of history within the epistemological space’.¹²⁶

Foucault’s metaphorical description of the ‘archaeology of knowledge’ suggests the peeling away of co-existing ‘layers’ of knowledge, a metaphor that incorrectly and sometimes lead him to be seen by his critics as being a structuralist. He rejected this as follows: ‘In France, certain half-witted “commentators” persist in labelling me a “structuralist”. I have been unable to get into their tiny minds that I have used none of the methods, concepts, or key terms that characterize structural analysis.’¹²⁷

Viljoen’s study period is characterised by critical societal change and adjustment in Khoikhoi society in a period of Dutch colonial expansion by dividing the geographical area into districts. The Cape Governor appointed *Landdrosts* and *Heemraden* to manage the rural districts. A Dutch style building, the *Drostdy*, served as the residence of the landdrost but was at the same time the administrative and legal centre for the district. This meant a change in the *locus* and geographic distribution in power relations. They were concentrated in the new legal/administrative hub but geographically spread inland as a semi-judicial structure with powers that extends beyond those of the courts.¹²⁸ Together with the power position of churches, they were institutions of coercion that simultaneously included but also excluded certain ways of thinking and human behaviour. More than one set of laws emerged; that of the Cape government, legal law, and that of the farms or the missionaries.

The following interpretation is based on Paul Oliver’s research into Foucault’s thinking.¹²⁹ Foucault argued that changes in education which followed from the widespread

¹²⁵ Ibid., 151.

¹²⁶ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 404.

¹²⁷ Ibid., xv.

¹²⁸ M. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* translated from the French by Richard Howard, with an introduction by David Cooper (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2001), 137.

¹²⁹ P. Oliver, *Foucault – The Key Ideas* (Oxon: Hodder Headline, 2010).

student protest of May 1968 in France, necessitated changes in the *thought processes* of the affected people at micro levels of the politics of micro-societal change that often succeeded in influencing the state on a bigger scale. The minds of ordinary French citizens were now open to new ideas and power that they previously would not have considered.¹³⁰ The argument here is that since Khoikhoi thinking and behaviour had to change because they became slaves and servants, not only as producers of labour, but also as producers of material gain for their masters in a new web of life's diverse workforce in which many now found themselves against their will. As a result, history as a human creation, equals different interpretations at different historical times. Historical events are then seen as social constructions rather than a collection of facts. This interpretation is reflected in the complex interactions between human beings.¹³¹ The changes, often challenging and violent from one ideology and episteme to another,¹³² are frequently 'represented as a series of facts or events, completely dissociated from the nature of human society'.¹³³ When Dutch colonial power was exercised by redistributing the influences and abilities to change the way all subjects' (the Khoikhoi and white peoples) behave through imposing Dutch laws onto society, all subjects soon found their new limits in their daily lives. Changes in the nature of the discourse (of how to react against the colonial powers), are closely related to the ideological positions of the everchanging colonial laws that define their lives. In the small confines of close micro-power relations, the disproportionate gender ratios¹³⁴ were exacerbated.

In this study the microhistorical method contributes considerably to what we thought and think, we know. The consequence from some evidence continue to result in different empirical re-evaluations and re-interpretations of sources. New hypotheses and systematic

¹³⁰ Ibid., 33–4.

¹³¹ Ibid., 20.

¹³² Ibid., 21.

¹³³ Ibid., 20.

¹³⁴ Ross, 'Khoesan and Immigrants', 186.

conclusions follow, in a sense, how the past reverberates into the present. New general propositions and different versions of truth drive historical beliefs into diverse research outcomes. John R. Hall argued that at ‘the intersection of historical and social sciences, no single methodology, no reigning philosophy of science, can claim legitimate domination’¹³⁵ because of these diversities. As a result historians disagree about how to study history, and when Sochen wrote in the early 1970s about limited perspectives, the best way to answer this is to propose that ‘[h]istoricity is a puzzle to be solved, rather than a solution to a puzzle.’¹³⁶ Even if history’s history was the domain of the pale male, it is hardly productive to parade past thinkers of centuries ago, in front of a twenty-first-century tribunal.¹³⁷

5. History of emotions

Keeping in mind any study which involves human emotions, accepts the ‘historical uncertainty principle, recognizing that history only balances possibilities against probabilities’.¹³⁸ Patryk Wawrzysński (et al.) wrote that ‘the presence of emotions do not reduce educational role of story-telling’.¹³⁹ To gain a sharper focus about human emotional behavioural outcomes, the

¹³⁵ J.R. Hall, ‘Historicity and Sociohistorical Research’, in W. Oathwaite and S.P. Turner, eds., *The Sage Handbook of Social Science* (London: Sage, 2007), 83, https://www.academia.edu/5393903/ Historicity_and_sociohistorical_research, accessed 4 Sep. 2023.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ N. Ron, ‘History and Presentism’, *Academia Letters* (2021), 4, <https://doi.org/10.20935/AL367>, https://www.academia.edu/45156461/History_and_Presentism, accessed 12 Oct. 2023.

¹³⁸ E. Muir, ‘Introduction: Observing Trifles’, in E. Muir and G. Ruggiero, eds., *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe* edited by Eren Branch (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), xiv.

¹³⁹ P. Wawrzysński, R. Schatthowsky, M.A. Muszyński and G. Czarnek, ‘Role of Emotions and Commitment in an Influence of Remembrance Narratives: Report From the Experimental Study’, *ATHENÆM. Polish Political Science Studies*, 48 (2015), 107–116, DOI: 10.15804/athena.2015.48.08, https://www.academia.edu/107734104/Role_of_Emotions_and_Commitment_in_an_Influence_of_Remembrance_Narratives_Report_from_the_Experimental_Study, accessed 10 Oct. 2023.

summary overview of the changes in the Colony (discussed in section 4 above) gave rise to the inherent degeneration of the Cape into a violent society.¹⁴⁰

The one-sided colonial imposition of its structures onto the lifeworld of the Khoikhoi, fragmented their society. This also holds true for 'lost' European peoples interpretation. Both had far-reaching changes and logically speaking, both evoked different emotions. It is questionable whether wagon drivers and herders were regarded as being of the same status not only among themselves, but also in the eyes and the treatment that they received from their masters. Slave females who were domestic servants during the day but bed mates at night, received the same treatment.

The fact that the Khoikhoi moved¹⁴¹ and were simultaneously forced away from old to new spaces, required emotional capital to adjust to life's new circumstances. New forced micro-relations had to be forged as a result of macro-level changes which originated away from the immediate masters' farm communities. In terms of explanations of human emotions this 'critical period of change and adjustment in Khoikhoi society'¹⁴² *needed more not less* communicative skills, which was lacking at the time. This does not imply that there were no communicative skills. It also does not imply that better communication skills was the most prominent variable. Early in the introduction of this article, the principle of varied human behaviour even under the same circumstances, was established.

The previous subsection gave a list of the changes that took place in the web of life of the Khoikhoi. It is reasonable to generalize that in all societies people are expected to live by the structures, rules and laws that govern them, sophisticated or not, as they might be. What is not apparent is the understanding and acceptance of such new existential *finis*. Glimpses into tradition (history of the present), reveal that the correlation between external conditions and

¹⁴⁰ Viljoen, 'Microhistory and Reclaiming Histories', 3.

¹⁴¹ R. Elphick 'The Khoisan to c. 1770', 19.

¹⁴² Viljoen, 'Microhistory and Reclaiming Histories', 2.

inner human feelings are not necessarily congruent because within people there is often the desire to move away from what is regarded or expected as the norm.¹⁴³ Lars Deile described this incongruence as the ‘horizon of expectations and space of experience’.¹⁴⁴

The intersections of individual and micro-group Khoikhoi emotions included an array of feelings – victimhood, dispossession, deprivation, love, passion, desire, lust, happiness, sadness, pain, hatred, malice, anger, guilt, envy and rage.¹⁴⁵ The emotional feelings in this uncertain gap between horizons of expectations and space of experience were varied, as were the Khoikhoi reactions as agents because human behaviour, apart from many other characteristics, carry irrational and unpredictable outcomes. Viljoen gave the following examples of different behavioural outcomes: defiance, aggression, resistance, retaliation, criminal acts including murder, mayhem, mutiny and martyrdom.¹⁴⁶ In essence, disputes were settled by resorting to violence, including violent response from the Cape’s institutions.¹⁴⁷ These views accept that emotions and behavioural outcomes of the above vary from one individual to the next and also from one ‘emotional community’ to another. The allowance for different human response behaviours are well-established in behavioural. In Magnússon’s view interpretations that are not accommodating, lead to interpretations of ‘societal stasis.’¹⁴⁸

The reclaiming of histories is not an easy process of research and writing, publishing and then reading. Scholars always write in the present, but not necessarily in the present tense

¹⁴³ S.G. Magnússon, *Emotional Experience and Microhistory. A Life Story of a Destitute Pauper Poet in the 19th Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020),

¹⁴⁴ L. Deile, ‘Conclusion. Historical Understanding Today: Incidental Remarks’, in Z.B. Simon and L. Deile, eds., *Historical Understanding. Past, Present and Future* (London, New York, Dublin: Bloomsbury Academic, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022), 293–4, https://www.academia.edu/78668368/Historical_Understanding_Past_Present_and_Future, accessed 20 May 2022. See also R. Koselleck, *Futures Past. On the Semantics of Historical Time*, (translated band with and introduction by Keith Tribe.) (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 255–275.

¹⁴⁵ Viljoen, ‘Microhistory and Reclaiming Histories’, 3, 7.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 3, 5.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 7, 9.

¹⁴⁸ Magnússon, *Emotional Experience and Microhistory*, 21.

or about the present. To uncover pasts, is closely related to their once futures, thereafter they became presents and finally, pasts, only to be brought back again into the presents through the labour of history writing – reclaiming not only lost histories. The above observations lead to the question about the emotions of the researcher of particular issues or set of issues that they have in relation to a particular previous time.

The business of reclaiming pasts is closely related to the ‘now’, meaning lived experience. One can ask how long does the ‘now’ lasts? When does the ‘now’ become the ‘not now’ any longer? What we experience in the present, is inextricably linked to remembering and forgetting of the once present.¹⁴⁹ On the one hand, the presence, is the now, or, in the moment, but is not stagnant since perceptions thereof simultaneously move forward into the unknown future but also back to become the unknown past. This makes the present always a process of being ‘underway’,¹⁵⁰ including being an ongoing lived experience. Some experiences are carried into writing because when we write, we do so ‘in the now’, the present about the uncovered past in efforts to reclaim it, meaning, previous human efforts, the recording of which are always incomplete. This is where social and or microhistory assists to enrich rather than diminish attempts to write about the past with interactions of personal emotions.¹⁵¹ Social microhistory is particularly suitable to show how the behaviour of marginal persons can be applied to shed light on the characteristic natures of authority,¹⁵² and of emotions in and between emotional communities. To write personal or private histories, and ‘lost histories’ as in the case of the Khoikhoi, points at a way forward.

¹⁴⁹ J. Russon, ‘Being Present. The Existential Challenges of Remembering and Forgetting’, *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, 43, 2, (2022), 323, https://www.academia.edu/106274655/Being_Present_The_Existential_Challenges_of_Remembering_and_Forgetting, accessed 5 Sep. 2023.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 324.

¹⁵¹ Viljoen, ‘Microhistory and Reclaiming Histories’, 7.

¹⁵² Muir, ‘Introduction: Observing Trifles’, xv.

Conclusion

Despite the best intentions and efforts of researchers, inevitable subjectively leaves ‘unseen’ aspects behind. It appears that there was little space for every-one’s emotional well-being during this study period. From the perspectives of the microhistorical method, for example, microhistory of spaces, temporalities and historical evidence, intertextual and denotative historical approaches to the research process, are influenced by earlier historiographical legacies. Stephen Petrina came to the conclusion that the diverse options about the manners in which collective memory about the past is created and upheld, and to follow historiography is a way about the creation, upholding visibility, or hiddenness of collective memory.¹⁵³

Paradoxically, these shortcomings produce new knowledge. And in all the above South African scholarly voices from the Global South, have one thing in common:

The purpose of microhistory is to elucidate historical causation on the level of small groups where most of real life takes place and to open history to peoples who would be left out by other means. [...]

They have been struggling with one of the biggest questions: what can we know about the peoples lost to history?¹⁵⁴

Rafał Nahirny argues that microhistorians add ‘surplus’ to their ‘qualitative and understanding analysis’ of life against the background of ‘all its lack of transparency’.¹⁵⁵

This study concludes that collective memory builds on from daily, real-life’s lived experiences, between the links of the micro with the macro, the intersections of micro-politics (power), micro-sociology (emotions) and the microhistorical method of analysis where their *praxes* meet the Venn-diagram’s area of overlapping.

¹⁵³ S. Petrina, ‘Historical Analysis’, *Methods of Analysis* [unpublished], (2020), 1, 3, https://www.academia.edu/42963003/Historical_Analysis, accessed 12 Oct. 2023.

¹⁵⁴ Muir, ‘Introduction: Observing Trifles’, xxi.

¹⁵⁵ R. Nahirny, ‘The Fate of a Scientific Puzzle. Clifford Geertz, Microhistories and Subjectivity’, n.d., 188–90, https://www.academia.edu/6470077/The_fate_of_a_scientific_puzzle_Clifford_Geertz_microhistories_and_subjectivity_Summary, accessed 20 Aug. 2023.

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